

VISION AND LIGHT IN APULEIUS' TALE OF PSYCHE AND HER MYSTERIOUS HUSBAND*

The importance of Platonism in Apuleius' studies and career, as well as its influence on *The Golden Ass* and, especially, the tale of Psyche and her mysterious husband, are issues that have rightly been at the centre of recent Apuleian studies and continue to draw the attention of scholars, who identify in the charming narrative of the old hag to the captive Charite elements that bear a striking similarity to specific thoughts or passages in Plato. The tripartite division of the soul, the desire of the soul to be united with the divine, the fall of the winged soul to the earth because of its evil burden, and the distinction between the heavenly and the vulgar types of love are Platonic ideas, which, according to some scholars, resemble specific events in the tale of Psyche; thus Psyche's name, the portrayal of her character in relation to her two sisters, her futile attempt to seize Cupid and fly with him to the sky, and the ambiguous role the goddess Venus and her son Cupid play in the heroine's life are themes that seem to transform Apuleius' literary fairytale into a philosophical allegory.¹

Although I do not subscribe to the category of scholars who interpret from a Platonist perspective every event and all the characters of this complex tale, my intention in this article is to complement the aforementioned approach to Apuleius' multilayered text by following another fruitful line of enquiry, which has undeservedly received no scholarly attention so far, namely the importance of vision as a means for Psyche to approach the light of truth and wisdom, and to achieve the longed-for union with the divine.² I will argue that Psyche's ardent desire to see her husband should be

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¹ Recent studies on the issue of Platonism in *The Golden Ass* include E. J. Kenney, *Apuleius. Cupid and Psyche* (Cambridge, 1990), 19–22; G. Sandy, *The Greek World of Apuleius. Apuleius and the Second Sophistic* (Leiden, 1997), 22–36, 176–232; K. Dowden, 'Cupid and Psyche: a question of the vision of Apuleius', in M. Zimmerman et al. (edd.), *Aspects of Apuleius' Golden Ass II* (Groningen, 1998), 1–22; M. O'Brien, '“For every tatter in its mortal dress”: love, the soul and her sisters', in M. Zimmerman et al. (edd.), *Aspects of Apuleius' Golden Ass II* (Groningen, 1998), 23–34; and (especially) S. J. Harrison, *Apuleius. A Latin Sophist* (Oxford, 2000), 136–209, 252–9. The unexpectedly large number of papers on Platonism in *The Golden Ass*, which were presented at ICAN 2000, testifies to the popularity of this topic in current Apuleian research; see M. Zimmerman, S. Panayotakis, and W. H. Keulen, *The Ancient Novel in Context* (Groningen, 2000), 86–7 and 111–12. For the dangers inherent in the study of this topic, see the cautious remarks of P. G. Walsh, *The Roman Novel* (Cambridge, 1970; repr. Bristol, 1995), 220–1, and J. L. Penwill, 'Reflections on a “happy ending”: the case of Cupid and Psyche', *Ramus* 27 (1998), 167–8 and 177–8.

² N. Slater, in his penetrating article 'Passion and petrification: the gaze in Apuleius', *CPh* 93 (1998), 18–48, and in his paper at ICAN 2000 entitled 'Spectator and spectacle in Apuleius',

primarily explained in terms of the continuous struggle of the soul to view divine light, from which truth and all other good things stem, and that Psyche's inability to grasp the real essence of her husband's nature is due to her poorly focused vision. I shall further demonstrate how Cupid's identification with divine light can be clearly seen in the text not only in the prominence of expressions denoting bright light in connection with him, but also in the recurring juxtaposition in the narrative of the motifs of eternal light and of everlasting knowledge versus the blindness of ignorance and the darkness of witchcraft.

It is important to emphasize, at the outset of this article, that I wish neither to impose a complex Platonic scheme throughout the narrative of this tale, nor to argue that Apuleius, the *philosophus Platonicus* who took his Platonism seriously, exploited the motifs of vision and/of light in his novel to advertise and promote Platonist philosophy. My belief is that this erudite sophist from North Africa entertains himself and his audience with narrative motifs (vision, blindness, light, darkness), which can be closely paralleled in Plato's theory of the soul, and which Apuleius exploits selectively in order both to unite, in a subtle and firm fashion, the first ten books of his novel, and to pronounce a religious message in the eleventh book, the climax of Lucius' adventures. Had Apuleius wished to engage in Platonist propaganda, he would not have chosen a novel as the narrative vehicle to convey his message to his audience. On the other hand, it seems to me that Apuleius cannot resist the temptation to enrich the dense literary texture of his amusing fictional creation by introducing reminiscences of Platonist philosophy, even if the result is comically incongruous and sometimes illogical. Vision is one of these Platonist reminiscences, and it is to this I turn now.

Vision plays an important role in Plato's well-known account of Socrates' discussion of the soul and its form (*Phaedrus* 246a ff.); Socrates likens the human soul to a pair of winged horses—one of noble breed, the other of low breed (246b)—led by a charioteer, and asserts that all winged horses with their charioteer, representing the soul, yearn to reach the upper regions (248a), where, united with the divine, they may behold truth and view reality. Socrates' conclusion is described explicitly: a soul that does not follow God, fails to realize its ultimate aim, namely to gain a view of reality (*Ph.* 248b–c; cf. *Ph.* 247d–e), for, burdened with evil, it grows heavy, loses its wings, and falls to the earth (*Ph.* 248c; cf. *Rep.* 519b).

A similarly intense yearning to see dominates the character and motivates many of the actions of Apuleius' heroine, whose name is revealed only when Cupid sees her for the first time (4.30.5).³ Psyche's disobedience to the repeated warnings of her

approaches the theme of vision in relation to Lucius from quite a different perspective. The motif of light in the tale of Psyche has been only partially discussed; the most comprehensive treatment of the topic so far is by R. de Smet, 'La notion de *lumière* et ses fonctions dans les *Métamorphoses* d'Apulée', in *Studia varia Bruxellensia ad orbem Graeco-Latinum pertinentia* (Leuven, 1987), 29–41 (with bibliography on the significance of light in Platonist philosophy). See also J. Krabbe, *The Metamorphoses of Apuleius* (New York, 1989), 131–9; P. Citati, 'La luce nella notte', *MD* 25 (1990), 165–77; Harrison (n. 1), 249, n. 174 (with more references to earlier bibliography on the allegorical interpretation of light in Apuleius' novel). It was a happy coincidence that at ICAN 2000 J. Bodel explored, with fascinating results, Apuleius' use of times of day to articulate his narrative; see Zimmerman et al. (n. 1, 2000), 10–11.

³ See P. James, *Unity in Diversity* (Hildesheim, 1987), 145–6. The anonymous referee rightly reminds me that withholding the names of the heroes is also an Ovidian narrative technique, which occurs in Ovid's telling of both familiar mythic tales and recondite stories, which he stamped with his own mark. J. J. Winkler, *Auctor & Actor: A Narratological Reading of Apuleius' The Golden Ass* (Berkeley, 1985), 89 attaches little importance to the circumstances in which Psyche is named for the first time.

mysterious husband that she should not set eyes on him (5.5.2–3, 5.6.2–3, 5.11.3–6, 5.12.4–6) ought not to come as a surprise to the reader, for the narrator has paved the way for this climax through a series of actions performed by (or related to) Psyche; in those actions expressions of seeing or observing with amazement abound in the narrative, and can be found already in the tragic princess's opening speech to her parents; the concluding statement of her bitter soliloquy, namely that she longs to see her noble spouse (4.34.6), ironically foreshadows the events of the fatal night in Cupid's palace and shapes the readers' perception of Psyche's character. The multitude of nouns and verbs or verbal forms of seeing, and the careful position in the narrative of qualifying adjectives and prepositional phrases in the account of Psyche's arrival at the enchanted valley,⁴ seem to me to indicate that, even if we make allowances for Apuleius' rhetorical writing, Psyche's attraction to Cupid's shining palace and to all bright items connected with him should be regarded as not simply the amazement of a simple young girl, who is speechless at the sight of a beautiful building situated in a most charming landscape, but as a soul's ardent desire for the divine light.

In fact, this impression is reinforced in Psyche's seductive speech to Cupid just before the third visit of her sisters; at that moment Psyche herself declares, rather hastily and with thoughtless enthusiasm, that even the darkness of night that veils her husband's face does not pose a threat to her happiness and does not arouse in her feelings of *curiositas*, because she can at least hold on to her husband and have him as her own light.⁵ Likewise, the fact that the name of the hero of this novel could be loosely rendered as 'man of light',⁶ provides some exciting word-play, when Lucius, whose misfortunes have so often been compared to Psyche's sufferings, prays to Isis to free him from his loathsome asinine form and to render him back to his former self and (consequently) to his former light (*redde me meo Lucio*, 11.2.4).

Moreover, vision is mentioned repeatedly in the *Phaedrus* as the way in which the soul—by means of the mind—may grasp abstract concepts such as reality, justice, temperance, and knowledge, and in fact embrace truth (*Ph.* 247d, 248b,c); there is no doubt in Plato's account that failure of the soul to reach the divine regions is expressed in terms of failure of the soul to see (*Ph.* 248a–c). Although I would be unwilling to argue that all expressions of seeing in Apuleius' novel bear or may be seen to bear a Platonic meaning, it seems plausible to me that Socrates' ideas in the *Phaedrus*, in conjunction with the views expressed about the soul in the imagery of the cave in Plato's *Republic*, are essential in understanding Cupid's oxymoronic warning to his wife, namely that if she sees his face she will not see it:⁷ just as a soul which was living in deep ignorance is dazzled when it comes out of its cave to face a luminous world,⁸ so

⁴ *videt lucum . . . videt fontem*, 5.1.2; *videre te diversorium*, 5.1.3; *prolectante studio pulcherrimae visionis rimatur singula*, 5.2.1; *conspicit*, 5.2.1; *ei summa cum voluptate visenti*, 5.2.3.

⁵ *iam nil officium mihi nec ipsae nocturnae tenebrae: teneo te, meum lumen*, 5.13.5; see Walsh (n. 1), 205, n. 4, and Kenney (n. 1), 158.

⁶ On Lucius' name see B. L. Hijmans, Jr, 'Significant names and their function in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*', in id. and R. Th. van der Paardt, *Aspects of Apuleius' Golden Ass* (Groningen, 1978), 110–11; R. Maltby, *A Lexicon of Ancient Latin Etymologies* (Leeds, 1991), 348–9, s.v.; O. Salomies, *Die römischen Vornamen. Studien zur römischen Namengebung* (Helsinki, 1987), 34. I owe the last two references to John Bodel.

⁷ *meos . . . vultus, quos, ut tibi saepe praedixi, non videbis si videris*, 5.11.4; see Kenney (n. 1), 155.

⁸ See *Rep.* 518a–b. A similar juxtaposition of darkness and light in relation to the course of a soul is expressed in the extant fragments of Plutarch's *De Anima*, fr. 178 (Sandbach).

Psyche, having not yet been disciplined to see Cupid as the true reality, is rightly warned that, if she saw Cupid's greater brightness, she would be dazzled.⁹

But why is Psyche not ready yet to understand the true nature of Love? The answer to this difficult question lies beyond the well-known flaws of Psyche's character, her *curiositas* and her *simplicitas*.¹⁰ It is instructive to read Apuleius' account, in his treatise *De Platone*, of the function of mortal eyes and the eyes of the mind: according to this passage, the nature of things is dual, and a rigid distinction is drawn between the two ways in which one approaches each side of this dual nature; the material world is perceived by the mortal eyes and can be even felt by means of the hands; however, the other aspect of nature, the permanent and everlasting one, can only be understood after careful thinking by means of the sharp vision of the mind.¹¹ This is clearly relevant in our case, for it seems to me that Psyche perceives everything that happens around her with haste and by means of her mortal eyes rather than with careful consideration and by means of her mind and the eyes of her soul; for this reason her vision is limited.

For example, Psyche is impressed, even dazzled, by the radiance of the palace and the items in it, but her ability to understand or question the origin and significance of it all stops at the stage of mere observation, admiration, and astonishment. She readily and without thinking accepts the conflicting pieces of advice her husband and her sisters give her,¹² and hastily follows the instructions of both of them. We are told that she feels devastated when her husband asks her not to see her sisters (5.5.3, 5.12.6), and that she even begs her spouse to allow her to see her sisters' faces instead of his face (5.13.2). By that point in the narrative it has become clear to the reader that the sisters are a poor substitute for Cupid, but it is also clear, through an elegant Apuleian pun, that Psyche's overwhelming desire to see is so vital to her that it would be the sole remedy to restore her *psyche* with joy (*tibi devotae Psychae animam gaudio recrea*, 5.13.4). Furthermore, the sight of Cupid asleep in all his glory (5.22) is not enough for Psyche to satisfy her insatiable curiosity about the identity of her spouse; although she feels ashamed of her murderous plans, she seems to absorb avidly every little detail of this majestic sight.¹³

⁹ Cf. her initial reaction of shock when she actually sees the god (5.22.3, 5.22.4). See Penwill (n. 1), 168.

¹⁰ On the theme of *curiositas* with reference to Psyche, Lucius, and other characters in this novel, see B. L. Hijmans, Jr, 'CURIOSITAS', in id. et al., *Apuleius Madaurensis. Metamorphoses Book IX* (Groningen, 1995), 362–79 (with copious references to earlier bibliography on this popular topic), and J. DeFilippo's reply to Hijman's views in S. J. Harrison, *Oxford Readings in the Roman Novel* (Oxford, 1999), 288–9.

¹¹ *De Plat.* 200 Moreschini: 'Naturasque rerum binas esse et earum alteram esse, quam quidem *δοξαστήν* appellat ille et quae videri oculis et attingi manu possit, alteram quae veniat in mentem, cogitabilem et intellegibilem: detur enim venia novitati verborum rerum obscuritatibus servienti. et superiorem quidem partem mutabilem esse ac facilem contuenti, hanc autem, quae mentis acie videtur et penetrabili cogitatione percipitur atque concipitur, incorruptam, immutabilem, constantem eandemque et semper esse. hinc et duplicem rationem interpretationemque dicit; namque illa visibilis fortuita et non ita perseveranti suspicione colligitur, at haec intellegibilis vera, perenni et constanti ratione probatur esse.' Cf. also *De Plat.* 193. For references to the eyes of the soul, which know what is good and what is evil, see n. 14.

¹² S. Panayotakis points out to me that Psyche naïvely believes her sisters' portrayal of the unknown husband as an immense serpent not only because it squares with the Pythian oracle given to Psyche's father, but also because the sisters support their thesis with the argument that many people have actually seen the monster (*plurimi viderunt eum*, 5.17.4).

¹³ *saepius divini vultus intuetur pulchritudinem, recreatur animi*, 5.22.4; *quae dum insatiabili animo Psyche, satis et curiosa, rimatur atque pertrectat et mariti sui miratur arma*, 5.23.1. The

On the other hand, Psyche's limited vision neither makes her a bad character nor implies that a person whose soul is endowed with penetrating vision is necessarily good. The usefulness or harmfulness of a soul's vision depends, according to Plato in the *Republic* and to Apuleius in *De Platone*, on the direction of the soul's conversion or shift. Psyche's cunning sisters are an excellent example of souls that do not direct rightly their vision and do not look where they should. They possess a little soul (*ψυχάριον*), to use a Platonic diminutive (*Rep.* 519a); their vision is sharp but also enlisted in the service of evil,¹⁴ and it is so misguided and misdirected that it metaphorically becomes a vision wasted, as Plato says, on blind eyes (*Rep.* 518b–c). The sisters rightly guess the divine quality of the light projected at Cupid's palace (5.9.6), but attempt to approach it for the wrong reasons. Through mad envy and malignant vanity they will, ironically, free Psyche from her 'blindness'; however, their own 'blind' and ambitious desires will secure them a fittingly gruesome death.

The motif of blindness is, of course, crucial not only in the events of Psyche's life, or indeed in the life of Charite, to whom the tale is narrated, and who punishes her husband's murderer by blinding him,¹⁵ but also in the whole of *The Golden Ass*. We are told that one of Psyche's sisters, besotted with blind hope to marry Cupid (5.27.2), throws herself from the cliff and falls victim to Psyche's vindictive plans. Her action is rash¹⁶ and leads to disaster, just like the impatient behaviour of Lucius before his transformation (3.24.2) or the thoughtless actions of Lucius' owners, who, in their blind haste (8.16.1), decide to ignore people's warnings to them not to travel during the night through an area plagued by wolves. The value judgement that Lucius, in his asinine form, makes about his owners is important, because it squares with his perception of his own rash and thoughtless actions regarding witchcraft, and with the way in which he visualizes the avenging spirit that chases him.

Before his transformation into an ass, Lucius confesses that he is greatly afraid of the blind dens of witchcraft, and it is no accident that blindness as a concept features also in Photis' apologetic account to Lucius about the magic forces that gave life to the inanimate wine-skins, which caused him so much trouble and humiliation.¹⁷ Furthermore, when Lucius eventually hears that, in spite of all he has suffered, people believe him to be responsible for the robbery at the house of his former host Milo,¹⁸ he comically imagines himself as one of those decent and honest people who have fallen victims to a Fortune that was, like Psyche's evil and 'blind' sisters, stark blind and without eyes; this pompous and apparently comic declaration is made again by Lucius later in the narrative in relation to his lewd experiences as a vehicle for the image of the

verbs *rimatur* and *miratur* (with their assonance and alliteration, their homoeoteleuton, and their equal number of syllables) have not been chosen here only for the opportunity they give to Apuleius to display his writing skills.

¹⁴ See *Rep.* 519a; cf. *Rep.* 518d. Similar views are expressed in Apuleius' *De Platone* 236 (Moreschini) and 251 (Moreschini).

¹⁵ On the removal of sight as a linking motif for Psyche and Charite, see James (n. 3), 197–9 and 232, n. 31.

¹⁶ Haste is a characteristic of the sisters' actions (5.7.1, 5.12.3, 5.14.1, 5.14.3, 5.16.1, 5.17.1, 5.21.2); it is stated even at the time of their death (5.27.1, 2, 5).

¹⁷ (Lucius to Byrrhaena) *Sed oppido formido caecas et inevitabiles latebras magicae disciplinae*, 2.20.1; (Photis to Lucius) *tunc protinus inexpugnabili magicae disciplinae potestate et caeca numinum coactorum violentia*, 3.18.3. On the diverse nuances of *caecus*, see D. K. van Mal-Maeder, *Apulée, Les Métamorphoses, Livre II, 1–20* (Groningen, 1998), 286.

¹⁸ The anonymous referee draws my attention to the false 'vision' of burglary that Lucius had when returning drunk from Byrrhaena's banquet (2.32.2–6).

Syrian goddess, and thus functions as a narrative device that links Lucius' adventures before and after his metamorphosis.¹⁹ However, Lucius' references to a blind Fortune acquire a religious dimension, when Asinius Marcellus, the priest who was instructed to initiate Lucius into Isis' cult, puts the abstract figure of the blind Fortune into perspective and contrasts it, in an often-quoted passage,²⁰ with the figure of a Fortune that, like the goddess Isis, has eyes and lightens by means of her clear light even the other gods.

The reference to Fortune with eyes and the correlation of light with divinity point, of course, to Isis. When she appears, the reader is left in no doubt that her primary characteristic is her brightness. Her intricate clothing, her hair, and her identifying objects, which shone, glowed, blazed, and gleamed, are variously described as 'glistening with white light' and 'shining with white brilliance' (11.3.4–5). Her most dazzling garment is a breathtaking, deep-black cloak, which is gleaming with dark sheen (11.3.5); she reveals to dumbfounded Lucius that 'you will find me, whom you see now, shining among the shades of Acheron' (11.6.6); she is instructing Lucius very lucidly in the darkness of night (11.22.2); her initiation-rituals, as experienced and revealed by Lucius, involve coalescence of dark night and bright sunlight (11.23.7). Her realms of influence are similarly described in terms of light (11.1.2). But perhaps the most revealing reference to her divine light comes when Lucius says to her image 'you . . . light the sun' (*luminas solem*, 11.25.3), thus implying that Isis' powers are among the most far reaching in the universe. As Cupid seemed even brighter than the light of Psyche's lamp (5.22.5), so Isis appears here to be brighter than light itself. We as readers are invited to link the importance of the divine Cupid and the divine Isis to the fortunes of the mortals Psyche and Lucius, respectively, and, once more, to relate the events of the tale to the adventures described in the rest of the novel.

There is no doubt that Cupid is the only source of genuine and eternal light in the tale. His true and divine nature is expressed in terms of light,²¹ while deprivation of light is suggested by Venus as the appropriate kind of punishment for his unruly behaviour and is associated with loneliness and suffering (5.30.6, 6.11.3). All things related to Cupid radiate blissful light. The gold columns of his palace (5.1.3)—indeed, the whole of the palace—generate a light of their own, which is quite separate from the light of the sun (5.1.6).

Sharply contrasted to the light that Cupid projects is the darkness of night in which the witches Pamphile in Apuleius and Hipparchus' wife in Pseudo-Lucian operate (3.21 and 12, respectively), and during which Lucius becomes an ass, both in Apuleius and in Pseudo-Lucian's abridged version of the Greek original (3.24 and 12, respectively). Darkness is also the temporal background against which Psyche's envious sisters reveal their malignant plans and devise their dark schemes (5.17.1, 2). The evil plan

¹⁹ *subibatque me non de nihilo veteris priscaequae doctrinae viros finxisse ac pronuntiasse caecam et prorsus exoculatam esse Fortunam*, 7.2.4; *sed illa Fortuna mea saevissima, quam per tot regiones iam fugiens effugere vel praecedentibus malis placare non potui, rursus in me caecos detorsit oculos*, 8.24.1. For references to the themes of the blindness and the fickleness of Fortune outside Apuleius' novel, see B. L. Hijmans, Jr, et al. (edd.), *Apuleius Madaurensis. Metamorphoses Books VI 25–32 and VII* (Groningen, 1981), 91–2.

²⁰ *Met.* 11.15.2–3; see J. Gwyn Griffiths, *Apuleius of Madauros. The Isis Book (Metamorphoses, Book XI)* (Leiden, 1975), 241–4; C. C. Schlam, *The Metamorphoses of Apuleius. On Making an Ass of Oneself* (North Carolina, 1992), 58–62. Venus' *inevitabiles oculos*, from which Psyche is desperately (though in vain) trying to escape (6.5.3), surely links the role of Venus in Psyche's wanderings with the role of Fortune (and of Isis) in Lucius' tribulations.

²¹ See 5.22.5–6 and Kenney (n. 1), 169.

that they concoct requires the illuminating services of a lamp, an instrument that has been associated with witchcraft in the first three books of *The Golden Ass* (1.12, 2.11, 3.21), in the episode of the transformation of Hipparchus' wife into an owl in Pseudo-Lucian's *Lucius or The Ass* (12), and in Apuleius' *Apology*.²² The reader who interprets logically the events in the tale of Psyche may well wonder why Psyche should need a lamp to see a god who is described as a source of bright light. One may even question how the darkness of night is able to conceal the identity of such a god. These are not the only illogical details in the old woman's tale, and they are only partly explained by references to the traditional association of Cupid with darkness in Hellenistic love-poetry, or to Cupid's portrayal when he first appeared in the tale (4.30.4). Readers are ultimately required to suspend their disbelief in order to watch Apuleius exploiting the elegiac motif of the lamp as a narrative device, which enables him to play with a host of conflicting ideas, such as good versus evil, light versus darkness, freedom versus slavery, and truth versus lies.

In the tale the lamp is clearly presented initially as an instrument of evil, since it would enable Psyche to pick the right moment to cut her husband's throat (5.20.5). In fact, it may be argued that the lamp acquires an identity of its own and becomes Psyche's accomplice to Cupid's attempted murder (5.26.4); if it had not been for the lamp, Cupid would not have woken up. According to the alluring yet deceitful terminology used by Psyche's sister, the jar, which would conceal the lamp, is represented as a dark prison, which temporarily detains light, vision, and knowledge behind bars;²³ once, however, the light is freed (5.20.4), the truth will shine, and the slaying of the mysterious husband will no longer be considered as murder but as a *praeclarum facinus*, 'a shining deed' or a 'shining crime' (5.20.4); the motif of the light of the lamp, then, is here exploited falsely to stress the allegedly just and righteous nature of the sisters' cause in giving such instructions to Psyche.

The conventional role of the lamp in folk-tales and in elegiac love-poetry²⁴ may make an allegorical reading of this Apuleian passage rather contrived; in fact, the narrator of the tale prefers not to take any decision, either on a literal or on an allegorical level, about the lamp's role in the events.²⁵ One could argue, of course, that the sisters are rightly urging Psyche to use the light of the lamp to free herself from her 'blind' status (5.22.2), yet the lamp is perceived as harmful by both Psyche and the old woman who narrates the tale.²⁶ Furthermore, the narrator's remark that Cupid's locks shone so brilliantly that the light of the lamp Psyche was holding flickered uncertainly

²² *Apol.* 42. See H. E. Butler and A. S. Owen, *Apulei Apologia* (Oxford, 1914), 101; de Smet (n. 2), 37–8; V. Hunink, *Apuleius: Pro se de magia* (Amsterdam, 1997), ad loc.

²³ It is worth noting here that both Psyche and Charite are also supposed to be imprisoned, the former in the darkness of Cupid's palace, which has no locks or bolts, the latter in the cave of the robbers.

²⁴ See Walsh (n. 1), 206, n. 2.

²⁵ *lucerna illa, sive perfidia pessima sive invidia noxia sive quod tale corpus contingere et quasi basiare et ipsa gestiebat, evomuit de summa luminis sui stillam ferventis olei super umerum dei dexterum*, 5.23.4; see Penwill (n. 1), 170. Although I share Penwill's scepticism about the unlikely hypothesis that the lamp acted in accordance with Cupid's orders, I view the events in which Psyche, Cupid, Psyche's sisters, and the lamp are involved as a plan or a game set not by Cupid or by the narrator(s) of the tale, but by the author Apuleius, who interweaves the various threads of the narrative and controls the actions of his characters.

²⁶ Psyche's words to her sisters: *conscio lumine vultus eius aspexi*, 5.26.4; *casu scilicet pessumo lucerna fervens oleum rebullivit in eius umerum*, 5.26.5. Comments made by the tale's narrator: *lucerna illa*, 5.23.4; *hem audax et temeraria lucerna et amoris vile ministerium*, 5.23.5; *at ille vulnere lucernae dolens*, 5.28.1.

(5.22.5) emphasizes strongly not only the superhuman quality of Cupid's light but also the temporary and poor value of the light of Psyche's lamp.

In spite of the reservations expressed above about the allegorical meaning of the lamp in the tale of Psyche, I would argue that the light of the lamp links the misfortunes of the naïve Psyche with the misadventures of the curious Lucius. It stands for the false and inferior light of witchcraft, by means of which people like Psyche and Lucius should *not* be seeking knowledge of the divine; it is as unworthy as the false light of eroticism and magic represented in the early part of Lucius' adventures by Photis, the servant-girl, whose name promises, in an attractively misleading fashion,²⁷ the light of everlasting knowledge. In fact, the inferior quality of the light of the lamp is clearly demonstrated, when the narrator Lucius contrasts it to the divine, heavenly light in the account of the procession of the devotees of Isis, who are said to carry 'lamps, torches, candles, and other sorts of artificial light to honour the source of the heavenly stars' (11.9.4).

The message conveyed so far is that knowledge of the divine secrets should not be attained by recourse to dark schemes, and that eternal light should be approached by mortal souls with the right means and at the right time. Psyche approaches Cupid's bright light thoughtlessly and hastily by means of her mortal eyes and with the aid of the artificial light of a lamp; consequently, she harms both herself and Cupid. Likewise, Lucius believes that the light of the lamp, though insignificant and fashioned by human hands, is a descendant of the greater fire of the Sun in heavens, and possesses not only knowledge of the future but also the power to communicate to people the secrets of that future (2.12.2). These beliefs and his affairs with Photis, who in the Greek original does not have this significant name, will eventually lead to his transformation into an ass.

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²⁷ On Photis' name see Hijmans (n. 6), 110. The bibliography on Photis' character and on her contrast with Isis is conveniently gathered and assessed by van Mal-Maeder (n. 17), 296–8. Harrison (n. 1), 249, n. 174 and 253, n. 204, does not accept the view that Photis constitutes a 'false' anticipation of Isis. Although I find this argument attractive, I have failed to find in the text any cogent evidence that Cupid's and Isis' bright lights are harmful and potentially dangerous, or that darkness associated with Psyche's sisters or with witchcraft is beneficial and rewarding.